I. Assessment Activities

As the Director of Writing, I have decided, along with the support of the Writing Committee, to suspend our usual assessment means, the holistic assessment of a research paper, in favor of analyzing the data we already have collected. As evidenced by our scoring of those papers since 2000, simply continuing what we were doing was not improving the education students were receiving.

We have been collecting papers for assessment since spring of 1996. For the seven years up to, and including, our more recent assessment, our numbers had stayed primarily below 70%, a failing percentage.

History

2000	60% average or above
2001	50%
2002	31%
2003	63%
2004	75%
2005	68%
2006	unavailable

While our number did seem to be improving slightly, the portfolio scoring session in the spring of 2006 revealed several problems in our assessment procedures and our program.

1. The Departmental Outcomes, Requirements, and Policies for English 101/102/201H/302 seemed inconsistent with the Grading Rubric for Assessment. Emphasis in the grading rubric is on structural elements such as grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and

documentation. The outcomes, on the other hand, focused on process-oriented strategies such as drafting and revising. Both certainly address all parts of piece of writing, but it is reasonable to believe that a piece of writing that would earn a high grade in class, thus fulfilling the outcomes, would not score well on the assessment.

2. Several scorers pointed out that the rubric did not allow for multi-genre or multi-media pieces of writing. Several instructors were emphasizing technology in the classroom making scoring of those products quite difficult and arbitrary.

We have taken the last two years to revise our program and our assessment so that we can deliver better writing courses to our students. We have addressed several areas of concerns.

Program Consistency

One thing that always becomes evident during a portfolio assessment is the various approaches to teaching composition. While variety is certainly a valuable component of a program, consistent outcomes must be expected. In order to maintain consistency and maintain academic freedom in teaching, we have made the following changes.

1. We adopted a common rhetoric, or textbook, for all sections of composition taught by instructors (full-time, part-time, and graduate assistants). However, most of the tenure-track faculty still choose to use their own texts.

2. We created new goals and objectives derived from the Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, the standard in the discipline.

3. A Policies and Procedures manual was created to clearly explain expectations of all instructors and classes.

Program Assessment

As explained above, low scores are partially due to differences between what was stated as expectations of courses and what was being asked for in the assessment. After updating and clarifying our expectations, I worked on improving our assessment procedures. Beginning in the spring of 2009, the following changes will be implemented.

1. Students will submit two pieces of writing instead of just one so that different types of writing can be assessed.

2. Students will submit all draft materials for the two writing samples so that evaluators can come to conclusions about what stages in the writing process need more attention.

3. After a trial in 2006, students will provide a one-page meta-cognitive reflection on their writing process in order to learn about how students understand their writing as growing.

4. Evaluation criteria will allow room for muti-genre and multi-modal writing to reflect changes in theory and pedagogy.

II. Current Outcomes and Assessment

The Writing Program will participate in two assessments of its outcomes. The two, while complimentary to each other, focus on different sets of data so that the program can identify its own areas in need of improvement and compare itself to peer institutions.

Portfolio Assessment

The Writing Committee has decided to emphasize three areas that we believe are particularly in need of attention which should result in better writing: technology (Processes),

community writing (all four), and meta-cognitive reflection (Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing). In time, we want writing portfolios to represent attention to these three areas. For Spring 2009, we will collect portfolios from each 102, 201H, and 302 course taught on campus. The portfolios will include two essays, all draft work for those essays, assignment sheets for those essays, and a meta-cognitive reflection about the student's writing process for those essays.

While the assessment rubric is still being determined, we can expect it to range from 1-4 in each category. As shown below, each Outcome has 4 or 7 categories to be assessed. Portfolios will receive an average of the 22 categories, an average of the 4 Outcomes, and individual category scores. By doing so, we should be able to determine what Outcomes and/or categories need emphasizing including teacher training. Each portfolio will be assessed by 2 raters. All raters will attend a calibration session. All are members of the MU Department of English.

Outcome	Assessment
Rhetorical Knowledge • Focus on a purpose • Respond to the needs of different audiences • Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations • Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation • Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality • Understand how genres shape reading and writing • Write in several genres	Portfolio
Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing • Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating • Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources • Integrate their own ideas with those of others • Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power	Portfolio
Processes • Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text	Portfolio

• Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading • Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work • Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes • Learn to critique their own and others' works • Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part • Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences	
Knowledge of Conventions • Learn common formats for different kinds of texts • Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics • Practice appropriate means of documenting their work • Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	Portfolio

National Survey of Student Engagement

Marshall University and the Writing Program have chosen to take part in the National Survey of Student Engagement this year. A short description from the email notification explains the program.

The NSSE results will be the results of answers students give to questions regarding writing. As such, they are indirect data. Portfolio assessments are direct assessments of students' work.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) have partnered to develop a set of 27 questions about writing and its teaching across the curriculum. In spring 2008, we administered these questions to 82 US colleges by adding them to the regular NSSE questions. The responses of 23,000 students provide the broadest snapshot so far of the writing that US undergraduates do.

At <http://comppile.org/wpa+nsse> http://comppile.org/wpa+nsse, you may view the questions we asked and the selected results that we shared at the 2008 WPA conference in Denver. The CompPile site also includes background information about the WPA-NSSE collaboration and will continue to develop as we share news and information.

III. Assistance Needed

We anticipate the need for compensation for those who rate the portfolios.

IV. What We Have Learned

Throughout the process of looking at our program goals and objectives and our assessment procedures of those, it has become obvious that the MU Writing Program has been built on a tradition of cutting edge theory and practice. We acknowledge the difficulty of maintaining one of the largest general education programs on campus and recognize the role that lack of resources, including adequate preparation time, has played in our previous assessment numbers. With only two short years, we have been able to get our program in sync so that our reporting numbers are more in line with the quality education taking place. We also freely admit that our program needed some vital attention. Along with the rest of the university, we are seeing the larger role that writing and the Writing Program plays in MU general education. We have consciously worked to improve our program with an eye towards general education reforms taking place across campus, curricula changes in our department, and theoretical shifts in the field of composition. In short, we have identified the changes that could be made quickly and those that will need additional time and resources.